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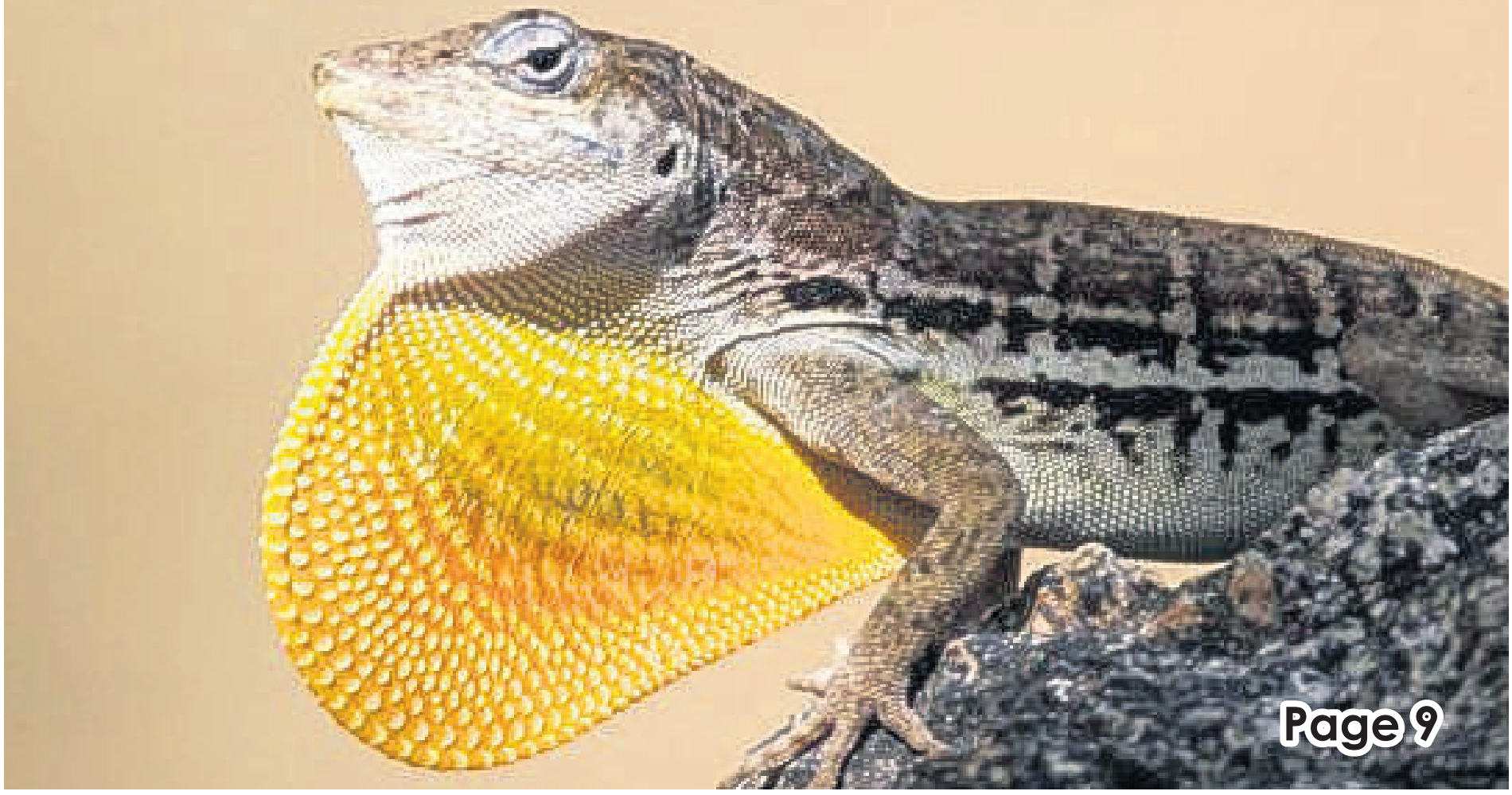
Sun catchers: The different lizards in Aruba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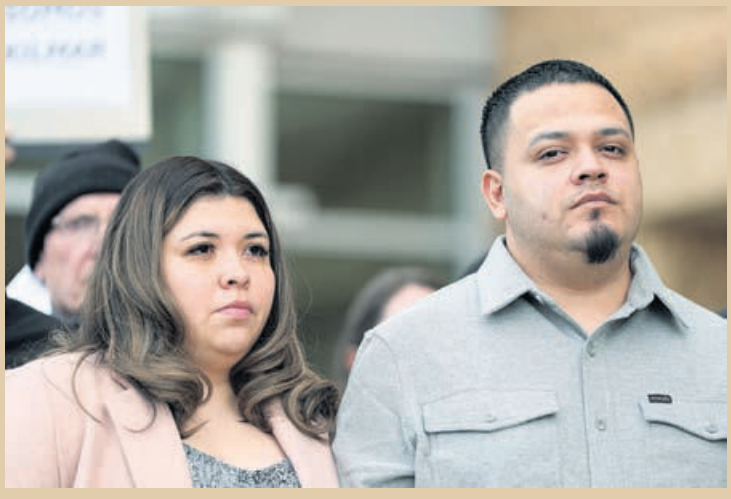
Judge blocks White House's attempt to defund the CFPB, ensuring employees get paid

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer NEW YORK (AP) — The White House cannot lapse in its funding of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, a federal district court judge ruled on Tuesday, only days before funds at the bureau would have likely run out and the consumer finance agency would have no money to pay its employees. Judge Amy Berman ruled that the CFPB should continue to get its funds from the Federal Reserve, despite the Fed operating at a loss, and that the White House's new legal argument about how the CFPB gets its funds is not valid.At the heart of this case is whether Russell Vought, President Donald Trump's budget director and the acting director of the CFPB, can effectively shut down the agency and lay off all of the bureau's employees. The CFPB has largely been inoperable since President Trump has sworn into office nearly a year ago. Its employees are mostly forbidden from doing any work, and most of the bureau's operations this year has been to unwind the work it did under President Biden and even under Trump's first term. Vought himself has made comments where he has made it clear that his intention is to effectively shut down the CFPB. The White House earlier this year issued a "reduction in force" for the CFPB, which would have furloughed or laid off much of the bureau. The National Treasury Employees Union, which represents the workers at the CFPB, has been mostly successful in court to stop the mass layoffs and furloughs. The union sued Vought earlier this year and won a preliminary injunction stopping the layoffs while the union's case continues through the legal process. In recent weeks, the White House has used a new line of argument to potentially get around the court's injunction. The argument is that the Federal Reserve has no "combined earnings" at the moment to fund the CFPB's operations. The CFPB gets its funding from the Fed through expected quarterly payments. The Federal Reserve has been operating at a paper loss since 2022 as a result of the central bank trying to combat inflation, the first time in the Fed's entire history its been operating at a loss. The Fed holds bonds on its balance sheet from a period of low interest rates during the COVID-19 pandemic, but currently has to pay out higher interest rates to banks who hold their deposits at the central bank. The Fed has been recording a "deferred asset" on its balance sheet which it expects will be paid down in the next few years as the low interest bonds mature off the Fed's balance sheet.❑

Director of the Office of Management and Budget Russell Vought speaks to reporters at the White House, Thursday, July 24, 2025, in Washington.

Associated Press

DOJ pushed to prosecute Kilmar Abrego Garcia only after mistaken deportation, judge's order says



Kilmar Abrego Garcia and his wife Jennifer Vasquez Sura leave the United States District Court District of Maryland, Monday, Dec. 22, 2025, in Greenbelt, Md.

Associated Press

By TRAVIS LOLLER
Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A newly unsealed order in the criminal case against Kilmar Abrego Garcia reveals that high-level Justice Department officials pushed for his indictment, calling it a "top priority," only after he was mistakenly deported and then ordered returned to the U.S.

Abrego Garcia has pleaded not guilty in federal court in Tennessee to charges of human smuggling.

He is seeking to have the case dismissed on the grounds that the prosecution is vindictive a way for President Donald Trump's administration to punish him for the embarrassment of his mistaken deportation.

To support that argument, he has asked the government to turn over documents that reveal how the decision was made to prosecute him in 2025 for an incident that had occurred nearly three years earlier. On Dec. 3, U.S. District Judge Waverly Crenshaw filed an order under seal that compelled the government to provide some documents to Abrego Garcia and his attorneys. That order was unsealed on Tuesday and sheds new light on the case.

Earlier, Crenshaw found that there was "some evidence" that the prosecution of Abrego Garcia could be vindictive. He specifically cited a statement by Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche on a Fox News program that seemed to suggest that the Department of Justice charged Abrego Garcia because he had won his wrongful deportation case.❑

SNAP bans on soda, candy and other foods take effect in five states Jan. 1

By JONEL ALECCIA
AP Health Writer

Starting Thursday, Americans in five states who get government help paying for groceries will see new restrictions on soda, candy and other foods they can buy with those benefits.

Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, Utah and West Virginia are the first of at least 18 states to enact waivers prohibiting the purchase of certain foods through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

It's part of a push by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins to urge states to strip foods regarded as unhealthy from the $100 billion federal program long known as food stamps that serves 42 million Americans.

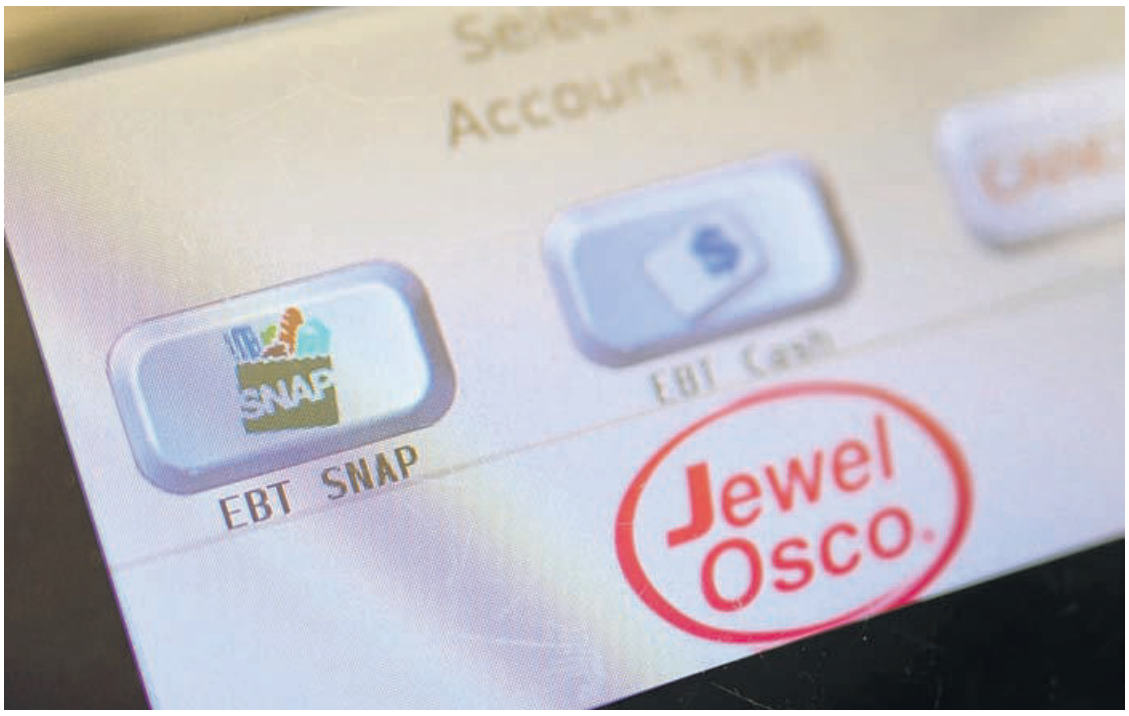
"We cannot continue a system that forces taxpayers to fund programs that make people sick and then pay a second time to treat the illnesses those very programs help create," Kennedy said in a statement in December.

The efforts are aimed at reducing chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes associated with sweetened drinks and other treats, a key goal of Kennedy's Make America Healthy Again effort.

But retail industry and health policy experts said state SNAP programs, already under pressure from steep budget cuts, are unprepared for the complex changes, with no complete lists of the foods affected and technical point-of-sale challenges that vary by state and store. And research remains mixed about whether restricting SNAP purchases improves diet quality and health.

The National Retail Federation, a trade association, predicted longer checkout lines and more customer complaints as SNAP recipients learn which foods are affected by the new waivers.

"It's a disaster waiting to happen of people trying to buy food and being rejected," said Kate Bauer, a nutrition science expert at the University of Michigan.



An EBT SNAP sign is shown on a self check out screen at a grocery store in Mount Prospect, Ill., Saturday, Nov. 1, 2025.

Associated Press

A report by the National Grocers Association and other industry trade groups estimated that implementing SNAP restrictions would cost U.S. retailers $1.6 billion initially and $759 million each year going forward.

"Punishing SNAP recipients means we all get to pay more at the grocery store," said Gina Plata-Nino, SNAP director for the anti-hunger advocacy group Food Research & Action Center.

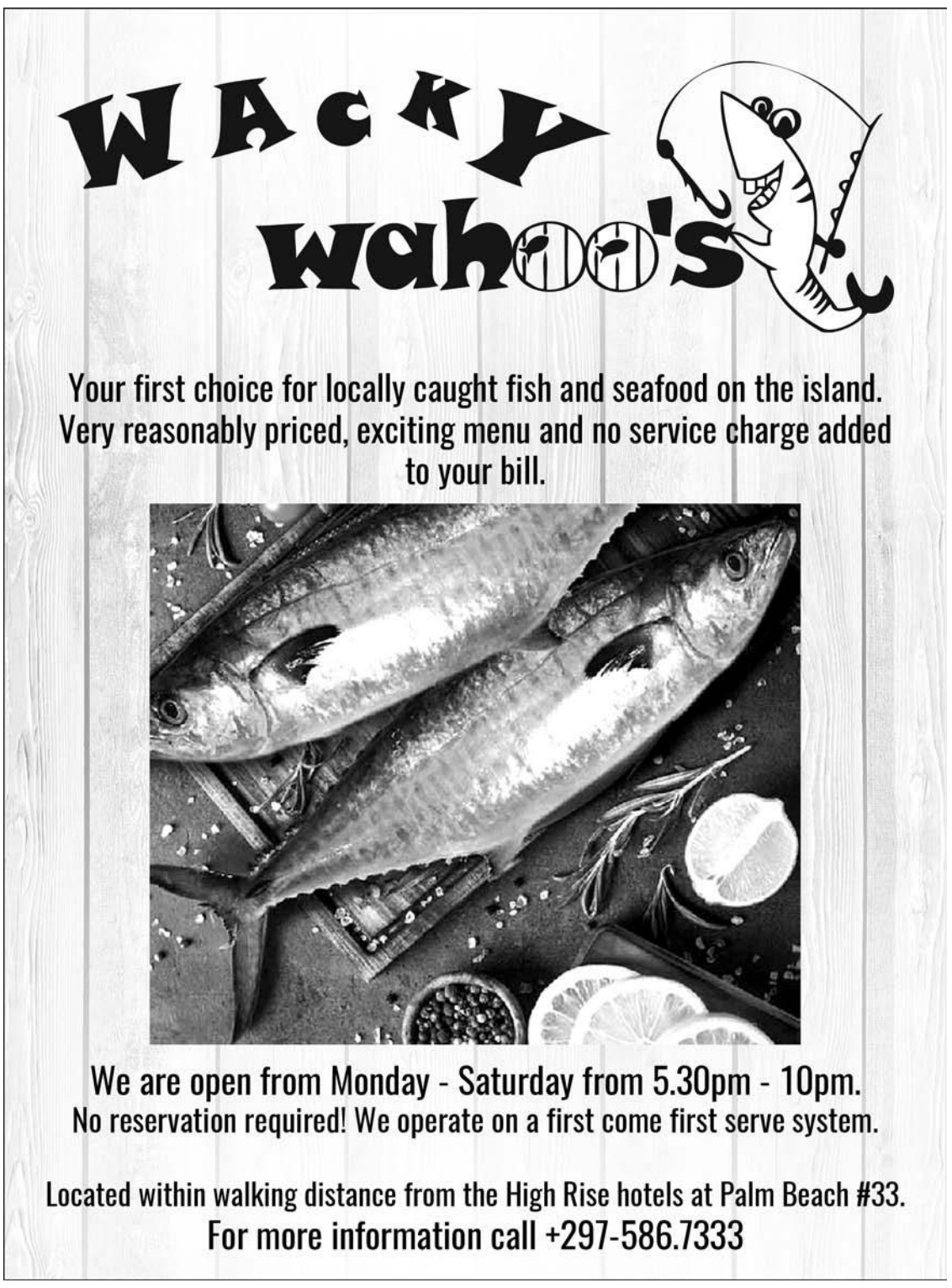
The waivers are a departure from decades of federal policy first enacted in 1964 and later authorized by the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, which said SNAP benefits can be used for "any food or food product intended for human consumption," except alcohol and ready-to-eat hot foods. The law also says SNAP can't pay for tobacco. In the past, lawmakers have proposed stopping SNAP from paying for expensive meats like steak or so-called junk foods, such as chips and ice cream.

But previous waiver requests were denied based on USDA research concluding that restrictions would be costly and complicated to implement, and that they might not change recipients' buying habits or reduce health problems such as obesity.

Under the second Trump administration, however, states have been encouraged and even incentivized to seek waivers – and they responded.

"This isn't the usual top-down, one-size-fits-all public health agenda," Indiana Gov. Mike Braun said when he announced his state's request last spring. "We're focused on root causes, transparent information and real results."

The five state waivers that take effect Jan. 1 affect about 1.4 million people. Utah and West Virginia will ban the use of SNAP to buy soda and soft drinks, while Nebraska will prohibit soda and energy drinks. ❑



Kennedy Center renaming prompts new round of cancellations from artists

By MEG KINNARD
Associated Press

More artists have canceled scheduled performances at the Kennedy Center following the addition of President Donald Trump's name to the facility, with jazz supergroup The Cookers pulling out of a planned New Year's Eve concert, and the institution's president saying the cancellations belie the artists' unwillingness to see their music as crossing lines of political disparity.

The fresh round of cancellations after Trump put his name on the building follows an earlier artist backlash in spring. After Trump ousted the Kennedy Center board and named himself the institution's chairman in February, performer Issa Rae and the producers of "Hamilton" cancelled scheduled engagements while musicians Ben Folds and Renee Fleming stepped down from advisory roles.

The Cookers, a jazz supergroup performing together for nearly two decades, announced their withdrawal from "A Jazz New Year's Eve" on their website, saying the "decision has come together very quickly" and acknowledging frustration from those who may have planned to attend.

Demonstrators, including Nadine Siler, of Waldorf, Md., dressed in a pink frog costume, hold up signs at a designated protest point in front of the John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts, a day after a Trump-appointed board voted to add President Donald Trump's name to the Kennedy Center, Saturday, Dec. 20, 2025, in Washington.

Associated Press

The group didn't mention the building's renaming or the Trump administration but did say that, when they return to performing, they wanted to ensure that "the room is able to celebrate the full presence of the music and everyone in it," reiterating a commitment "to playing music that reaches across divisions rather than deepening them."

The group may not have addressed the Kennedy Center situation directly, but one of its members has. On Saturday, saxophone player Billy Harper said in comments posted on the Jazz Stage Facebook page that he "would never even consider performing in a venue bearing a name (and being controlled by the kind of board) that represents overt racism and deliberate destruction of African American music and culture. The same music I devoted my life to creating and advancing."

According to the White House, Trump's hand-picked board approved the renaming. Harper said both the board, "as well as the name displayed on the building itself represents a mentality and practices I always stood against. And still do, today more than ever."❑

Texas man accused of trying to aid Islamic State group is charged with international terrorism

The seal of the Dept of Justice is shown on the podium Tuesday, Aug. 1, 2023, at an office of the Department of Justice in Washington.

Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — A 21-year-old Texas man who authorities say provided bomb materials and money to people he believed were affiliated with the Islamic State group has been federally charged with international terrorism, the U.S. Department of Justice announced Monday.

John Michael Garza Jr. of Midlothian, Texas, is accused of giving bomb-making materials to an undercover federal agent who he believed was an "ISIS brother," the Justice Department said, using a different abbreviation for the Islamic State group.

No attorney was listed for Garza in court records and the federal public defender's office in Dallas did not immediately respond to phone messages seeking comment. If convicted, Garza could face up to 20 years in federal prison. The Dec. 22 sting operation came after an undercover New York City Police Department employee found a social media account belonging to Garza that followed several accounts supporting the Islamic State group, authorities said. The New York employee began messaging with Garza in October, and the Justice Department said Garza soon shared that he "ascribed to the ISIS ideology." Garza is accused of sending the undercover employee small amounts of cryptocurrency in November and December, allegedly believing his money was supporting the Islamic State group.

During the Dec. 22 meeting, investigators say Garza described to an undercover FBI agent how to mix explosives he provided and offered to share an instructional video on bomb-making. ❑

European and Canadian leaders discuss U.S.-led peace efforts in Russia-Ukraine war

In this photo provided by Ukraine's 65th Mechanized Brigade press service, recruits attend drills at a training ground in the Zaporizhzhia region, Ukraine, Monday, Dec. 29, 2025.

Associated Press

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and KATIE MARIE DAVIES
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Leaders from Europe and Canada held talks Tuesday on U.S.-led peace efforts to end the nearly four-year war between Russia and Ukraine, as Moscow and Kyiv sparred over Russian claims, denied by Ukraine, of a mass drone attack on a lakeside residence used by President Vladimir Putin.

The virtual meeting included European leaders as well as Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, heads of European institutions and NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, according to Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

"Peace is on the horizon," Tusk told a Polish Cabinet meeting. But he added: "It is still far from a 100% certainty."

It was the first meeting of European leaders since U.S. President Donald Trump hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at his Florida resort on Sunday. Trump insisted that Ukraine and Russia are "closer than ever before" to a peace settlement, although he acknowledged that outstanding obstacles could still prevent a deal.

Zelenskyy on Tuesday announced plans for upcoming meetings with officials from about 30 countries, dubbed the Coalition of the Willing, which support Kyiv's effort to end the war with Russia on acceptable terms.

National security advisers from those countries aim to meet in Ukraine on Jan. 3, followed by a meeting of the countries' leaders on Jan. 6 in France, he said on social media. He thanked Trump administration officials for their readiness to participate but provided no further details.

"We are moving the peace process forward," German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who attended Tuesday's talks, said in a post on X. "Transparency and honesty are now required from everyone including Russia."

His pointed reference to Russia came after Russian and Ukrainian officials exchanged bitter accusations over Moscow's allegations that Ukraine attempted to attack the Russian leader's residence in northwestern Russia with 91 long-range drones almost immediately after Trump's Sunday talks with Zelenskyy. The claims and counter-claims threatened to derail peace efforts. "I don't like it. It's not good," Trump said Monday after Putin told him by phone about the alleged attack.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha noted Tuesday that Russia "still hasn't provided any plausible evidence" to support its allegations.

Moscow won't do so because "no such attack happened," he wrote on X. "Russia has a long record of false claims," he added, referencing the Kremlin's denials it intended to attack Ukraine ahead of its Feb. 24, 2022, all-out invasion of its neighbor.

Zelenskyy, speaking Monday, also branded the allegation as "another lie" from Moscow designed to sabotage peace efforts.❑

Iran's president says answer to attack would be harsh in apparent response to Trump warning

By NASSER KARIMI
Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Tuesday said his country's answer to an attack would be harsh, which appeared to be in response to a warning by U.S. President Donald Trump over reconstruction of Iran's nuclear program.

"Answer of Islamic Republic of Iran to any cruel aggression will be harsh and discouraging," Pezeshkian said on the social media platform X.

Pezeshkian did not elaborate, but his statement came a day after Trump suggested the U.S. could carry out military strikes if Iran attempts to reconstitute its nuclear program. Trump made the comment during wide-ranging talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

"Now I hear that Iran is trying to build up again," Trump said during a news conference with Netanyahu after their meeting. "And if they are, we're going to have to knock them down. We'll knock them down. We'll knock the hell out of them. But hopefully that's not happening."

The two leaders discussed the possibility of renewed military action against Tehran months after a 12-day air war in June that killed nearly 1,100 Iranians including senior military commanders and scientists. Iran's retaliatory missile barrage killed 28 people in Israel.

Trump suggested Monday that he could order another U.S. strike against Iran.

"If it's confirmed, they know the consequences, and the consequences will be very powerful, maybe more powerful than the last time," Trump said.

Pezeshkian said Saturday that tensions between the sides already had risen.

"We are in a full-scale war with the U.S., Israel and Europe; they don't want our country to remain stable," he said.

Iran has insisted it is no longer enriching uranium at any site in the country, trying to signal to the West that it remains open to potential negotiations over its atomic program.

U.S. intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency assessed Iran last had an organized nuclear weapons program in 2003, though Tehran had been enriching uranium up to 60%, which is a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%.

Meanwhile, some of the largest protests in three years entered a third day Tuesday after the country's currency plummeted to a record low against the U.S. dollar. The head of the Central Bank resigned on Monday.❑

Masoud Pezeshkian, the President of Iran, attends the United Nations General Assembly at United Nations headquarters, on Sept. 25, 2025.

Associated Press

Protests draw largest turnout of Somalis since Israel's recognition of Somaliland

By OMAR FARUK and FARNOUSH AMIRI
Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — Tens of thousands of Somalis gathered across the country Tuesday to protest Israel's recognition of the breakaway region of Somaliland, a move condemned by more than 20 countries as an attack on the East African nation's sovereignty.

Meanwhile, Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud arrived in Turkey on Tuesday for talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, following Israel's announcement.

At a U.N. Security Council emergency meeting Monday, Somalia protested the recognition saying it poses regional security issues. The Israeli representative decried those comments as a double standard because other nations have recognized Palestine as a state. The U.S. special representative said the country's position on Somalia remains unchanged.

Last week, Israel became the first country to recognize Somaliland, drawing strong condemnation from Turkey already at odds with Israel over the war in Gaza as well as from Somalia and other nations.

Hundreds of Somalis gather at the Mogadishu stadium as they protest Israel's recognition of Somalia's breakaway region of Somaliland as an independent nation, in Mogadishu, Somalia, Tuesday, Dec. 30, 2025.

Associated Press

Somaliland, a territory of more than 3 million people in the Horn of Africa, declared independence from Somalia in 1991 during a period of conflict that left the country fragile. Despite having its own government and currency, Somaliland had never been recognized by any nation until Friday. In the Somali capital, Mogadishu, crowds gathered at the main stadium for a rally led by prominent religious figures who condemned Israel's recognition and called for unity in defense of Somalia's territorial integrity.

Similar protests were reported in Baidoa in the southwest, Guriel and Dhusamareeb in central Somalia, and Lasanod and Buhoodle in the northeast. Protesters in those towns chanted slogans rejecting the recognition and waved Somali flags, according to residents and video footage shared online.

The combined protests marked the largest turnout of protesters since Israel's declaration.

At the Mogadishu rally, traditional leader Mohamed Hassan Haad called on Somalis to oppose the recognition and warned against any attempts to claim Somali territory, urging people in Somaliland to reject the move.

Religious scholar Sheikh Mohamud Sheikh Abulbari also condemned Israel's decision, describing it as unacceptable and saying it was wrong to welcome Israel into any part of Somalia, citing Israel's actions toward Palestinians and Muslims at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Somalia's permanent representative to the United Nations, Abukar Dahir Osman protested the recognition at the Security Council meeting Monday. "Israel's action not only sets a dangerous precedent but also poses a serious threat to regional and international peace and security," he told the council.

In Istanbul on Tuesday, Mohamud expressed gratitude to regional and international institutions that opposed Israel's recognition of Somaliland, describing it as a violation of international law, the United Nations Charter, the African Union's principles, and established diplomatic norms.❑

41 young men die in South Africa from circumcision procedures during initiation ceremonies

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME
Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — At least 41 young men have died as a result of circumcision procedures as part of traditional initiation activities in South Africa in November and December, authorities said Tuesday.

Traditional initiation is a rite of passage into manhood for young men that is practiced annually by various ethic groups in Africa, including parts of South Africa.

Among them are the Xhosa, Ndebele, Sotho and Venda communities.

Traditionally, young men are isolated at initiation schools where they are taught cultural values and responsibilities as they become adults. The circumcision part of the initiation results every year in the deaths of some initiates, forcing the government to intervene through legislation.

The laws force initiation schools to be registered with authorities, but this has not stopped the proliferation of illegal initiation schools where many of the deaths are reported.

Xhosa boys stand in a field during traditional Xhosa male circumcision ceremonies into manhood in Qunu, South Africa, on Saturday, June 30, 2013.

Associated Press

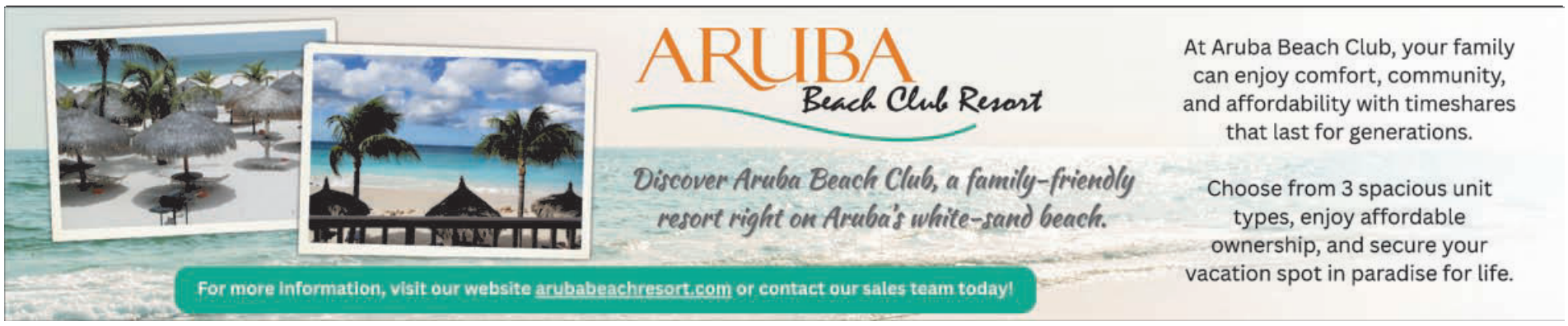
Parents are expected to pay for their children to be accepted into the initiation school for the prescribed period, which for some is a financial motivation to start an unregistered initiation school.

Initiation periods typically run during winter (June-July) and summer (November-December) school holidays.

South Africa's Traditional Affairs Minister Velenkosini Hlabisa told local broadcasters Tuesday that 41 initiates died during this year's summer initiation. He blamed negligence on the part of both the initiation schools, including registered ones, and parents for not adhering to safety standards and medical advice.

Hlabisa said some of the unproven advice often given to the young men is to avoid drinking water in order to heal faster.

"There is negligence in terms of meeting health standards in some of the initiation schools. If you take your child to an initiation school, you never make a follow-up, you do not monitor, you do not go there to see whether the child does drink water, you are placing your child at risk," he said.❑



Visit the island's hidden natural pools

(Oranjestad)—Amongst the countless beaches surrounding the island that are well-known and frequently visited, there are an additional two "hidden" natural pools that are situated in the northern coast of the island, two ideal stops in your tour itinerary.

Conchi (Natural Pool)

For many years, Conchi was the only natural pool that we had on the island. Located in the Arikok National Park, near Boca Keto and the Daimari Ranch, Conchi—also known "Cura di Turtuga (Turtle's Cove) or just Natural Pool—is reachable with any 4×4 vehicle or by foot if you're up for a long hike. However, since it is part of the National Park, you must first get permission from park management to enter. You would have to purchase a day pass, and receive a wristband as proof of payment. Once you've completed that, you are set!

If you decide to hike from the entrance of the Arikok National Park, this is also possible: do bring plenty of protective clothing and enough water and food—it could take you up to three hours to hike there!

However, when you eventually do get there, you will be greeted with crystal blue water surrounded by a natural rock formation that protects you from the wild waves on the other side. Though the pool is located on the northern side of the island (where the sea is largely rough and largely no suitable for swimming), the pool itself is very calm. It's also relatively deep, and you can climb up the rocks and jump in!

Cave Pool

This relatively new pool appeared just a few years ago, when a part of the dried up coral cliff floor broke off and created a partition between the ocean and what is now the natural pool that is hidden there. Because it's still so new, there is no official name for it, but most people just call it the cave pool.

Just like the Conchi, the new natural pool is situated on the northern coast of Aruba. However, this pool is much easier to reach with any type of vehicle, and there is no hiking needed. This spot has also become a regular stop for touring visitors.

When you get there, maybe you won't be able to spot the pool immediately, because you will probably notice the moon-shaped lagoon where wild northern waves crash into each other. Sounds scary, but if you look down on your right, you'll see a calm, crystal blue little pool in the corner. To get there, you have to climb down some stairs. Be careful when climbing down and follow the instructions of your tour guide if you have one.

And just like Conchi, this pool also has a jumping spot, and a rope to climb back up the boulder.❑

Picture of cave pool is credited to RockaBeach Tours.

Beautiful areas around Aruba

(Oranjestad)—In Aruba, there are tons of activities that to enjoy during your visit, but sometimes you just want to slow down and enjoy the view. Here are some beautiful areas on the island that will have you in awe.

The hidden Natural Bridge

Here in Aruba we have three natural bridges and many see this one on thinking that it's the world famous one but it's not. The why is easy, it's way too dangerous to go down the cliff to reach this beauty and no tour companies will do that. Some people refuse to go down due fear of height. To reach this beauty you must go to San Nicolas and drive up the hill till The Point Lighthouse, park your car and walk until you reach the east point coast and go left along the coastline and good luck going down the cliff.

Surfside Beach

This beach was very famous when we were kids and many locals love to swim at this beach. After some years the locals shifted to the more north-west beaches like Eagle, Boca Catalina and Arashi but after the government renovated the whole area it got a new facelift and its back as a family beach and weekends are just amazing at this area.

Natural Bridge at Blackstone Beach

As mentioned, there are three natural bridges and this one is in the Arikok National Park. The other two Bridges you can visit by car but for this one you must have a 4x4 jeep or you will get stuck at the Andicuri Beach.❑

Dear beloved reader,

The world is saying goodbye to another year, and we at Aruba Today want to give a small shout-out to you and wish you a Happy 2026.

We are extremely grateful for the constant support that we get from you. Your suggestions, questions and lovely comments keep us motivated and inspired to bring you the best of what Aruba has to offer. For 2026, may we continue to provide entertaining and insightful content for you. We wish you and your loved ones health, love and success in 2026. Happy New Year!

Love,
The Aruba Today team.
Ps: Aruba Today will be back on January 3rd 2026.

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Sun catchers: The different lizards in Aruba

ORANJESTAD – Colorful or camouflaged, you're bound to encounter a variety of lizards basking in the sun or scurrying on their way in our island. From the charming, friendly iguanas to the good-luck gecko Pega-Pega, you're bound to meet a few of these special residents during your visit.

Aruba, as a desert island, is home to an incredible variety of unique and colorful species. Among them we can find different lizards, most of which have South American origins. But there are a few exceptions.

Iguanas

Iguanas are easy to spot, as they are larger than most other lizards and when young, have a bright green color that makes them stand out.

The iguanas usually found in Aruba are the Iguana, known as the green iguana, or locally as Yuwana. The Yuwana are a mostly herbivorous species, and can grow up to 2 meters in size, including the tail, making them one of the largest in the iguana family. As you will see, despite their name, as they reach adulthood, the iguanas can take on a grey or blue tone instead of the bright green displayed by the young ones. In Aruba – as in the rest of the Kingdom of the Netherlands – the most usual color varies from green to lavender, black and sometimes a reddish brown.

Yuwana is a protected species, as it is listed under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), meaning that international trade is regulated through the CITES permit system. In the past, Arubans used to eat a popular Yuwana soup, as it was believed to give strength and help restore health – probably due to the protein boost it delivered. However, it is now illegal to catch, kill, buy or sell Yuwanas in Aruba, and this includes eating them!

Turnip-tailed gecko

The turnip-tailed gecko is known locally as the Pega-Pega, meaning sticky-sticky, due to the way it sticks to walls using the suction in its little fingers. They are found inside houses, and are mostly a nocturnal animal.
According to Etnia Nativa, the local Pega Pega is immediately recognizable by its large size, with a body length of up to 12 cm, and its large, swollen tail, approximately the same length or slightly shorter than its body; females are larger and more robust than males. It has short, robust legs with flattened toes and extensive basal webbing.

The undersides of its toes are covered in lamellae, which are used as friction pads to cling to smooth vertical surfaces. Some can even walk around completely upside down. Its toes are covered with ridges, which are peppered with millions of microscopic bristle-like structures called setae that attach and detach when the animal wills them to, and they never get gunked up.

They are variable in coloration, from a mottled dark gray to orange-brown, and are capable of changing color depending on their mood and surroundings. Mottled and banded markings aid in camouflage against tree bark. They are harmless and fragile; you can hold one in your hands as long as you are VERY gentle.
Never put pressure on its tail because it will surely drop as a measure to try to distract the predator, and they are different from other lizards because they're long-lived, talkative, lack eyelids, and their small scales are situated next to each other like cobblestones rather than overlapping as is the case in most other lizards.

Turnip-tailed Geckos are insectivorous and feed on cockroaches, grasshoppers, beetles, flies, mosquitoes, and spiders, which makes them the best pest control to have at home! They spend their days concealed in dark tree grooves and cavities, in narrow crevices in the walls, or behind paintings, which provide the perfect shelter for them. Pega pega is a gecko endemic to our island, but in time, some 4–5 intrusive gecko species have been observed, some of which do not cease to amaze us with the racket they make, especially during the hours of the night.

The Pega-pega Phyllodactylus Julieni is also a protected species in Aruba, by law. It is illegal to kill them!

Blue Cododo

These are one of the most striking lizards in Aruba, recognizable by the male's bright blue color. The Aruban whiptail lizard, Cnemidophorus arubensis, is a species endemic to Aruba, meaning you can only find it here on our One Happy Island! They are also recognized as the most common and populous lizard on the island. While the male is blue with white dots, the female is brown with blue dots.

These charming lizards eat mostly plants, such as flowers, nectar, leaves and fruits, and occasionally enjoy some insects. They are selective in which plants they eat, because of the toxins present in many available plants species. The Cododo help take care of Aruba's vegetation by playing a significant role in the dispersal of seeds for certain plants: when they eat fruit, they excrete the seeds in diverse locations, contributing to the reproduction cycle of our local plants.

Striped anole

The striped anole (Anolis lineatus) that lives in Aruba is known locally as Waltaka or Toteki. This is a species of lizard in the family Dactyloidae, and they are native to Aruba and Curaçao. It is usually found in dry areas, commonly where there are not large trees; rather they enjoy rocks, walls or tree trunks, as they prefer to stay close to the ground.

These lizards are about 7cm in length, have a brown color with a stripe on each side and typically, several stripes on the body and tail that are lighter in color. It has a dewlap which is orange-yellow – and what's unique about this species is that it is the only known species of anole where the dewlap is asymetrically colored, with one side being a deeper orange and the other side a lighter yellow. Mostly this is seen in the males, as it is almost imperceptible in the females. If the Toteki shows you his dewlap, retreat! This is not a friendly greeting!

Lizards are wonderful creatures that are precious to our fragile, local ecosystem. Please be mindful of these residents as you enjoy your stay.❑

Images: Some images are from Aruba Birdlife Conservation.

Alto Vista chapel and its link to Aruba's origins

According to Etnia Nativa, in the 18th century most of the inhabitants of Aruba were indigenous who lived on the north coast, one of the largest communities lived in Alto Vista.

As they were very religious, they had a chief with the name of Antonio Silvester who guided them in the Christian life and it was he who decided to build a stone chapel with a roof of corn rods, which would serve as a place of prayer. In 1750 it was blessed by Father Algamesi who came from Coro-Venezuela and appointed Domingo Antonio Silvester as the island's first prosecutor in the name of the Spanish crown and Rome. In 1752 the prosecution passed into the hands of Antonio Silvester's son-in-law, Miguel Álvarez, who continued to guide the parishioners in their prayers.

According to the book, The History of Alto Vista by R.H. Nooyen, it is not known when Domingo Antonio Silvester came to Aruba from Venezuela. The elders believe Antonio was a Spaniard. In 1780, father Joseph Antonio de la Vegal called Bernardino Silvester, one of Antonio's sons with his wife Anna Cathalina Tromp, "neighbors and naturals of the island Aruba" and thus they became natives.

At the end of the eighteen century many inhabitants the island died as a result of the black fever epidemic and since people believed that the Alto Vista area was the most infected, they began to build their homes further south within the Noord area, so the town of Noord began to grow into a community till getting its own Church. However religious festivals continued to be celebrated at this sacred native place, with the custom of arriving in procession to Alto Vista.

Two-hundred years after the beautiful time of Alto Vista, people can no longer see much of the town of Alto Vista from 1750. With a lot of work they found the old foundations of the Church of the Queen of the Holiest Rosary to build a new chapel on the same place. The entire surrounding area was empty and desolated, making it hard to imagine that Alto Vista was a town at all. A hundred years later, people can see the remains of around twenty houses, some made of stone and others of clay. Nowadays, only around six of these houses remain.

South of the chapel in the yard two graves can be observed, there was the cemetery which father Pablo de Algemesi blessed. It is not certain, but it is believed that the two graves belong to Antonio Silvester and Miguel Alvares, according to Nooyen. About 50 meters near the chapel there are still the markings of an old house, where Antonio and Bernardino Silvester would have lived. About 200 meters from the chapel there is a water tank which the locals call Tanki Cacique. In the past this tank was closed. But mostly water was brought out from the Poz di Noord, a well dug in the sand.❑

Cas di Torto

Cas di torto (also called cas di lodo or cas di bara) is a traditional building technique from Aruba. It refers to a type of houses made of mud with rounded corners. These houses were usually found around the plantations. The few structures that still exist are the oldest structures that are left standing in the country.

The technique probably came over from the Venezuelan Paraguaná Peninsula in the 18th century. Existing houses date back 150 years. Until 1925 many houses on Aruba were built using this technique, afterwards it fell into disuse. In 2005 there were 62 cas di torto houses left, of which only four were in good condition.

The skeleton of the houses is made up of round wooden poles placed with distances of 1.5 feet between them. Branches are interwoven between them, completing the structural support. On this basis, loam is applied, mixed with sand, water and paragrass. This is then coated with aloe vera juice, which gives the white color and helps to protect against the weather.

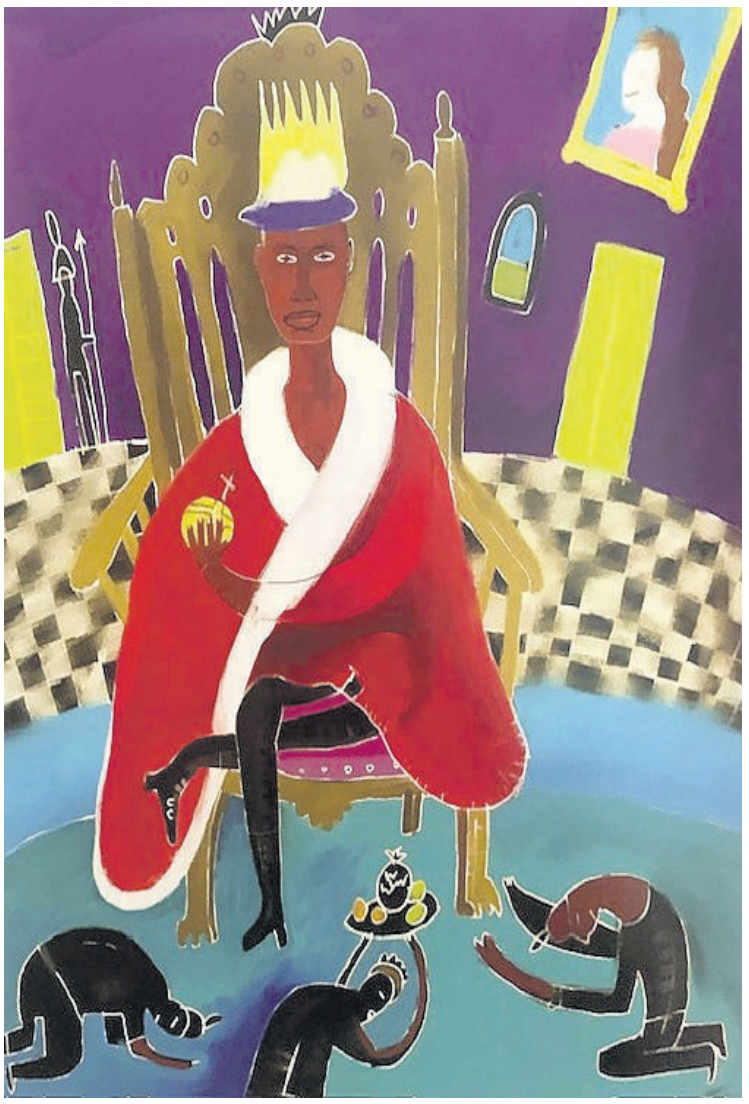
On top of the poles pieces of wood are fitted that serve as the base for the roof beams. Until 1815 the roofing usually consisted of corn (maize) stems, afterwards the nuclei of columnar cacti were used. The floor is made of loam, mixed with cement or cow dung.

The houses were usually divided into a kitchen, a living room, a porch and a bedroom. In the kitchen would be a wooden or metal barrel for storing water that was collected in small rain ponds. Around this barrel a thick loam wall would be erected. Often large families would live in these houses; people would sleep on mats on the floor.

If you visit the Arikok National Park you will be able to see a very nice cas di torto.❑

The stories of "Compa Nanzi"

(Oranjestad)—The most popular character you may hear about in the Caribbean is Anansi, known locally on Aruba as "Compa Nanzi". Local children grew up hearing the tales of the conniving spider, and his legacy forms part of the oral narrative tradition that is common in Aruba.



Although the stories are most popular in the Caribbean, "Compa Nanzi" is not entirely unknown globally, especially not in the West African region. Brought to the "new world" by enslaved Africans from Ghana, the historical thread of how Nanzi was introduced on Aruba follows the enslaved Africans in Curacao during the colonial era, which saw the biggest population of enslaved Africans in the Dutch Caribbean.

The stories of Compa Nanzi were a sign of hope for freedom among the slaves, who passed around different stories involving the famous spider through word of mouth, due to not being able to express their native culture in the new world. These stories were a way to not only preserve their culture, but it acted as a medium for relief during the harsh treatment to which they were subjected to.

It wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century that the stories of Nanzi were written down in different languages. However, not all stories are completely alike in every country, as is the risk of oral story telling. However, one thing will always be dominant in Compa Nanzi's stories: his sneaky ways to get what he wants!

How Nanzi fooled the king

One day Nanzi was taking a stroll near the castle of Shon Arei, the king. He had this sudden urge to walk in. He didn't think too much about it and committed to what he had in mind. It was a warm afternoon, and the castle personnel were taking their afternoon nap. Even the soldier guarding the castle door was fast asleep, snoring so loud that his beard bounced up and down on his chin. Nanzi just slipped past him, looked back for a moment then walk right on in.

Nanzi stumbled upon the king's quarters. With all his excitement he sat in the king's throne, and put on his crown that was hanging on the side of the throne. It was very hot that day, and it wasn't long until Nanzi too fell asleep, right there on the king's throne. He was so deep in sleep and snoring so loud, that even when the king found him in his seat, Nanzi did not even notice.

Shon Arei was flabbergasted by the sight of Nanzi on his throne, wearing his crown. How disrespectful! "Soldiers, get him!" he commanded. Nanzi was sound asleep, but when the soldiers picked him up, he jumped from fright. By then though, the soldier already had him in their hold.

"Put him in a sack, stitch it up and throw him in the ocean!" the king said furiously. Two soldiers immediately entered the chamber, took the crown off Nanzi's head and pushed him in a sack.

Nanzi was terrified; it looks like this time he won't get away with his schemes. To get to the ocean, the soldier walked a long distance, and where beginning to feel very thirsty. Luckily they passed by a pub, and decided to have a nice cold beer. They set the sack with Nanzi in it outside and went to enjoy the refreshments. Nanzi was still trembling with fear in the sack.

What is that he hears? A herd of sheep walking by?

"Compadre, listen here!" Nanzi screamed as loud as he could. The sheep herder got close to the sack. "What is this?"

"Man, there is something very beautiful in here that you can see. It's very rare and strange, but indeed, there is something so beautiful in here that you've never seen or will ever see," Nanzi told the herder.

The herder, very dumb, believed Nanzi's word. "Let me see!" he said.

"Well if you must insist," Nanzi said, "I'll let you take a look, but only for a quick second." The herder opened the sack, and Nanzi immediately jumped out. Before the herder could even take a look into the sack, Nanzi pushed him in it, and the herder fell head first in.

Nanzi didn't waste any time, and closed off the sack real tight. He then picked up the herder's hat and starting walking behind the traveling sheep as if nothing happened. After a little while, the soldiers headed back outside to continue their journey. As they picked up the sack, the poor herder started screaming to let him out, but the soldiers ignored him, thinking it was Nanzi.

Shon Arei went strolling a while later. He thought to himself: "This time Nanzi could not get away with his foolishness. He probably drowned in that sack ages ago." That is why, when he saw Nanzi walk behind the herd of sheep on the street, he was flabbergasted again. "Nanzi! Aren't you suppose to be at the bottom of the ocean floor?"

"I was, Your Majesty," Nanzi replied. But you know what; there are so many things to see down there in the sack! Like this herd of sheep. Seeing that they had no herder, I started walking behind them and gained their trust pretty quickly. At the bottom of the ocean there are so many wonderful things, like diamonds, and bags of gold. Chests of silver and other precious stones," Nanzi told the king.

"What is that you say?" the king was intrigued. "I want to see it too!"

The king immediately demanded to his soldiers to be put in a sack and be placed in the ocean. Naturally, Shon Arei died because of this. He was never found again. Nanzi followed the soldier back to the castle, where sat once again on the late king's thrown and put his crown on. He took possession of all of Shon Arei's belongings, and lived the rest of his life as king.❑

Story and pictures are from "Kon Nanzi a Nek Shon Arei (i otro kuentanan antiano di e araña sabi)" by Nilda Pinto.

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

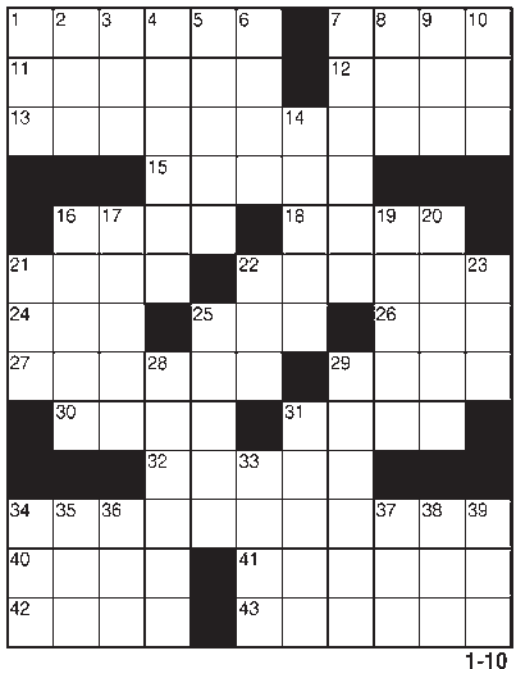
R	O	U	T	E	■	M	O	I	S	T
E	A	S	E	L	■	I	N	D	I	A
D	R	E	A	M	■	D	E	L	L	S
■	■	■	K	E	P	T	■	E	L	K
B	A	K	E	R	I	E	S	■	■	■
E	M	I	T	■	G	R	E	E	C	E
T	E	N	T	S	■	M	A	C	A	W
A	N	G	L	E	R	■	N	O	S	E
■	■	■	E	L	E	M	E	N	T	S
S	A	W	■	F	O	O	T	■	■	■
A	L	I	B	I	■	S	T	R	A	P
L	O	S	E	S	■	S	L	I	C	E
T	E	E	T	H	■	Y	E	M	E	N

ACROSS

1 Set upon
7 Gorillas and gibbons
11 Oddball
12 Monument Valley sight
13 Gallant fellow's remark
15 Gown material
16 Foot features
18 Small statue
21 Copier problems
22 Tyrant
24 Log chopper
25 Simple card game
26 Regret
27 Look over
29 Past due
30 Store event
31 Foots the bill
32 Colorado resort
34 Michelle and Jill, for two
40 Composer Satie
41 Juice choice
42 Ernst's art
43 Drop drastically

DOWN

1 Piercing tool
2 Poseidon's place
3 Comic Caesar
4 Comes up
5 Brainstorms
6 Missing
7 Pretty good grade
8 For each
9 Snaky shape
10 Plopped down
14 Bran offering
16 Price add-ons
17 Psi follower
19 Mist
20 Track tipsters
21 Mayo buy
22 Pop
23 Casual top
25 Take by force
28 Denali setting
29 Martin of "Ed Wood"
31 Strand unit
33 Settle heavily
34 Nourished
35 Writer Levin
36 Free (of)
37 Roadhouse
38 Easter find
39 Notice



1-10

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-10 CRYPTOQUOTE

RXT HFXC EXC K BQCBRV JLGBJ WEG CEXQG RGBL?

CGQQ, WEKV WKYG K'Y XFQR MXKFM WX JLGBJ XFG JBR BW B WKYG. — NEBLQKG DLXCF

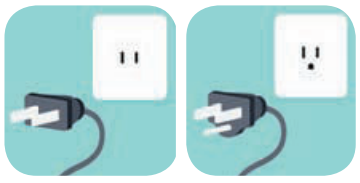
Cryptoquote: A DAY WITHOUT SUNSHINE IS LIKE, YOU KNOW, NIGHT. — STEVE MARTIN

Cruise ship Schedule: Dec. 25 - 31 2025

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
THU	25	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	18.00	B	1
		BRILLIANCE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		NORWEGIAN DAWN	11.00	20.00	I	1
FRI	26	NORWEGIAN JEWEL	07.00	20.00	B	1
		CARIBBEAN PRINCESS	09.00	22.00	C	1
		ISLAND PRINCESS	09.00	18.00	I	1
SUN	28	MARELLA DISCOVERY	08.00	20.00	B	1
		CELEBRITY ASCENT	09.30	23.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS - Dept.	****	22.30	E	-
MON	29	SEABOURN OVATION	08.00	22.00	B	1
		MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	C	1
TUE	30	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
		OASIS OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1
WED	31	BRITANNIA	07.00	18.00	B	1
		CARNIVAL VISTA	08.00	22.00	C	1
		EXPLORER OF THE SEAS	11.59	****	I	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basicbut important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 8 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku

	1				2			
			1		3		4	
	7	4						1
4			3				7	8
			2	4		9		
		6	7	8				
		7	5	2		3		
	9		8	3		5	6	7
	4					8		2

Difficulty: ★★★ 12/31

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Answer to previous puzzle

5	9	8	1	6	2	7	4	3
7	1	2	8	3	4	9	6	5
4	3	6	9	7	5	1	2	8
1	5	4	7	8	3	2	9	6
3	6	7	2	1	9	5	8	4
2	8	9	4	5	6	3	1	7
9	4	5	3	2	8	6	7	1
8	7	3	6	9	1	4	5	2
6	2	1	5	4	7	8	3	9

Difficulty: ★★ 12/30

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Grace Chyuwei pours water on Joe Chyuwei to help with the heat Aug. 3, 2025, in Death Valley National Park, Calif.
Associated Press

2025 was one of three hottest years on record, scientists say

By ALEXA ST. JOHN
Associated Press

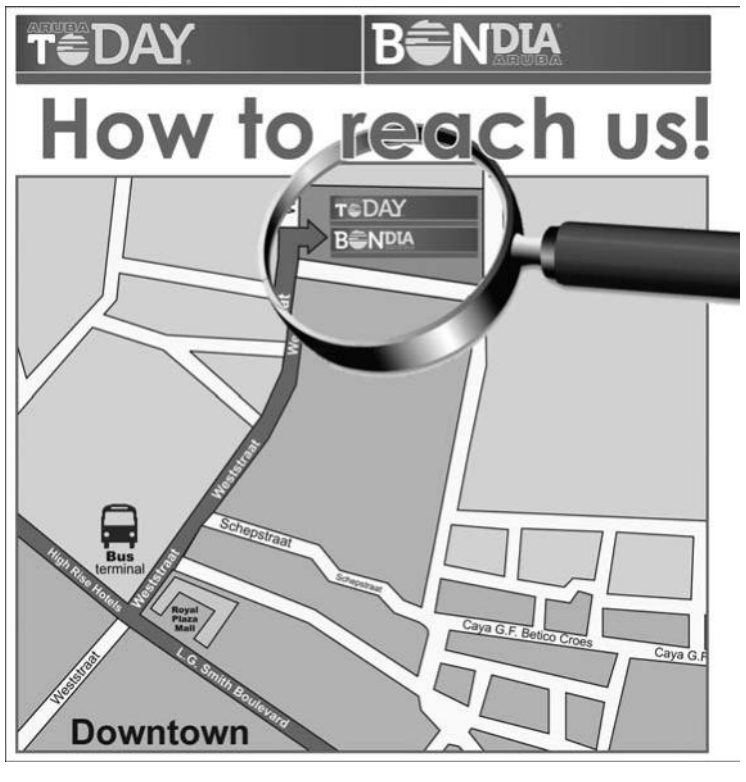
Climate change worsened by human behavior made 2025 one of the three hottest years on record, scientists said.

It was also the first time that the three-year temperature average broke through the threshold set in the 2015 Paris Agreement of limiting warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) since preindustrial times. Experts say that keeping the Earth below that limit could save lives and prevent catastrophic environmental destruction around the globe.

The analysis from World Weather Attribution researchers, released Tuesday in Europe, came after a year when people around the world were slammed by the dangerous extremes brought on by a warming planet.

Temperatures remained high despite the presence of a La Nina, the occasional natural cooling of Pacific Ocean waters that influences weather worldwide. Researchers cited the continued burning of fossil fuels oil, gas and coal that send planet-warming greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

"If we don't stop burning fossil fuels very, very, quickly, very soon, it will be very hard to keep that goal" of warming, Friederike Otto, co-founder of World Weather Attribution and an Imperial College London climate scientist, told The Associated Press. ❑



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3 rd floor ocean view
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12 office spaces (Map approved)
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2630,92 m2 (53,820 sq feet)
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House For Sale
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Price :$1,300,000
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

House For Sale
Washington Noord
5 min drive to palm / eagle beach
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With pool
Price :$750,000
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com
219942

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Eagle beach
1 Bedroom week 52
On 2 sd floor friday check in
Price :$12,500
Call :011-297-630-1307

House for sale
Savaneta high way
Lease land 601 m2
4 BR 3 bath
Price :$ 350,000
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Violence Against Women

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Private islands
Christmas week
1 BR WK 51 room # 2136
Ground floor garden view
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

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Eagle Beach
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15 weeks remaining $10,000
1 BR week 01 room # 3208
8 weeks remaining $6000
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19 weeks remaining
Price :$6000
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Divi Phoenix
Palm beach
Penthouse 2 BR WK # 1 room # 672
21 weeks remaining
Price :$40,000
Call :011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Divi Village Golf
Eagle beach
Studio week # 5 room # 4225
25 weeks remaining
Price :$ 8000
Call :011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Condo project
Palm beach
Property land 4433m2
42 Appartments
39 x 88m2 and 3 x 72m2
Price :$5,357,098,20
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

Le Vent
Eagle beach
3 BR 3 1/2 bath
5th floor ocean view
Price :$1,550,000
Call :011-297-630-1307
johnnypaesch@gmail.com
219942

HEALTH

DOCTOR ON DUTY

Oranjestad
Hospital 7:00 pm / 10:00pm
Tel. 527 4000

San Nicolas
Imsan 24 hours
Tel.524 8833

PHARMACY ON DUTY

Oranjestad:
Sta. Cruz: Tel.585 8028
San Nicolas:
Centro Medico: Tel.584 5794

OTHER

Dental Clinic 587 9850
Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
Urgent Care 586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic
+297 588 0539

EMERGENCY

Police	**100**
Oranjestad	**527 3140**
Noord	**527 3200**
Sta. Cruz	**527 2900**
San Nicolas	**584 5000**
Police Tipline	**11141**
Ambulancia	**911**
Fire Dept.	**115**
Red Cross	**582 2219**

TAXI SERVICES

Taxi Tas	**587 5900**
Prof. Taxi	**588 0035**
Taxi D.T.S.	**587 2300**
Taxi Serv. Aruba	**583 3232**
A1 Taxi Serv.	**280 2828**

TRAVEL INFO

Aruba Airport	**524 2424**
American Airlines	**582 2700**
Avianca	**588 0059**
Jet Blue	**588 2244**
Surinam	**582 7896**

AID FOUNDATIONS

Aruba Food Bank
Tel. 588 0002

FAVI- Visually Impaired
Tel. 582 5051

Alcoholics Anonymous
Tel. 736 2952

Narcotics Anonymous
Tel. 583 8989

Fundacion Contra Violencia Relacional Tel. 583 5400

Centre for Diabetes
Tel. 524 8888

Child Abuse Prevention
Tel. 582 4433

Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

General Info

Phone Directory Tel. 118

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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

How to build an emergency fund, pay off debt and make a plan for your money in 2026

By ADRIANA MORGA
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The start of a new year usually brings new motivation to achieve goals like eating healthier or finally cleaning your basement. Many resolutions also focus on financial goals, such as paying off credit card debt, saving for a new house, or simply getting more educated about money.

"New Year's is a really good time to review and realign your financial goals overall," said Erica Grundza, certified financial planner at Betterment, an investing and savings app.

When building your goals for 2026, Grundza recommends focusing less on the past and more on an optimistic, yet realistic, vision for the future. She recommends that you focus on reestablishing the "why" behind your approach to money and how you want to make it work for your life. This can be as simple as saving $10 each week in a savings account, or a bigger goal like saving to buy a house in the coming years. It's all about your own journey.

A canning jar filled with money sits on a shelf in East Derry, N.H., June 15, 2018.

Associated Press

The Associated Press spoke with people who are making financial resolutions for 2026. Here's a look at what they're planning and how you can draw inspiration for your own resolutions:

Making achievable plans

Resolutions can easily turn into unattainable goals that feel more like a dream, said MarieYolaine Toms, a coach and founder of Focused Fire, a financial coaching company. To avoid setting unrealistic expectations, Toms follows a "no resolutions" mindset and instead focuses on making an actionable plan.

"What I say every year is that I am not making resolutions, I'm making plans that can be tracked forward, traced back, and tweaked until completion," Toms said.

Recently, Toms encouraged her clients to check their credit report with the three credit bureaus and, based on their credit reports, make an attainable plan to start a savings account.

For example, adding $25 to their savings account every week.

Whether you're trying to pay off debt or save for a vacation abroad, the first step towards making a plan can be creating a budget. When making a budget, it's best to find a technique that works for you, whether it's the classic 50/30/20 plan or another budgeting style. If you're building a budget for the first time, you can find some expert recommendations here.

Paying off debt

After losing her job as a magazine editor in September, Rachel Pelovitz, 33, had to take a closer look at her finances. Having acquired a significant amount of debt over the last few years due to her husband's year-and-a-half-long unemployment, Pelovitz explored several options to pay it off. Ultimately, Pelovitz and her husband chose to sell their house and work with a debt consolidation organization.

"Rather than rely on getting more debt, we are currently selling our house," Pelovitz said.

Pelovitz's main goal for 2026 is to pay off half of her credit card debt. And, with some of the money from selling the house, start investing moderately.

If you've also experienced a layoff, you can read expert recommendations to help you take care of your finances and your mental health here.

Building a savings account

For Jenni Lee, 27, this is going to be the year when she gets strict about building her savings account. While Lee considers herself generally good with money, over the last six months she has overspent and wants to rein it in. The long-term goal for her savings journey is for Lee to buy a house.

"I'm now in my late 20s, I'm starting to really think about where I pinch now so it won't hurt later when I finally decide to purchase and own a place," said Lee, a tech worker and lifestyle TikTok creator based in Chicago.

As she saves for her future home and possibly a trip to South Korea, Lee wants to cut unnecessary spending on clothing items and eating out.

Social media microtrends are a common influence on people's shopping decisions, and this can lead to overspending. If you're looking to avoid spending money on microtrends, you can find experts' recommendations here.

Building an emergency fund

If you are in a position to do so, having multiple financial goals you're working towards at the same time can be a great way to speed up your progress. For Worcester resident Melanie Duarte, 23, her New Year's money goals include paying off her student loans and credit card debt while building an emergency fund.

"I made sure to include it in my budget, even if it's something as small as like $50. I just want to make sure I still put something in (my emergency fund) so that it eventually multiplies," said Duarte, who owns a marketing agency.

Duarte's family didn't speak openly about finances when she was growing up. But, since she opened her own business, Duarte has been slowly working on rewriting her relationship with money. If you're looking to start an emergency fund or create better habits while you save, you can read some experts' recommendations here.

Finding balance

Finding a balance between saving for your long-term goals while also making sure you enjoy your money is important, but it can also be challenging.

After the death of her grandfather just a few years after retirement, Tiana Stewart, 26, felt that he didn't get to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

So, this past year, Stewart decided to enjoy her life and travel.

"I do understand saving for retirement is important, but I also want to enjoy my life and the money that I work for at this time, especially being in my 20s," said Stewart, who lives in Maryland.

But now, as she reflects on her financial future, Stewart wants to focus on paying off debt, saving, and investing.

Having a healthy balance between enjoying life and saving for the future is what she wants to work toward.

For some, participating in budgeting challenges such as the no-buy year can be a great way to set boundaries on your spending and set aside money towards your financial goals.

Many people start such challenges at the beginning of the year and commit to keep going until the end, but others start with a no-buy month.❑

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Editor
Caribbean Speed Printers N.V.
Aruba Bank N.V. Acc. #332668
Caribbean Mercantile Bank N.V.
Acc. #23951903
RBC Royal Bank Acc. #1330772

Editors
Pilar Flores
Richard Brooks
Angenette Figuereo
Oriana Geerman

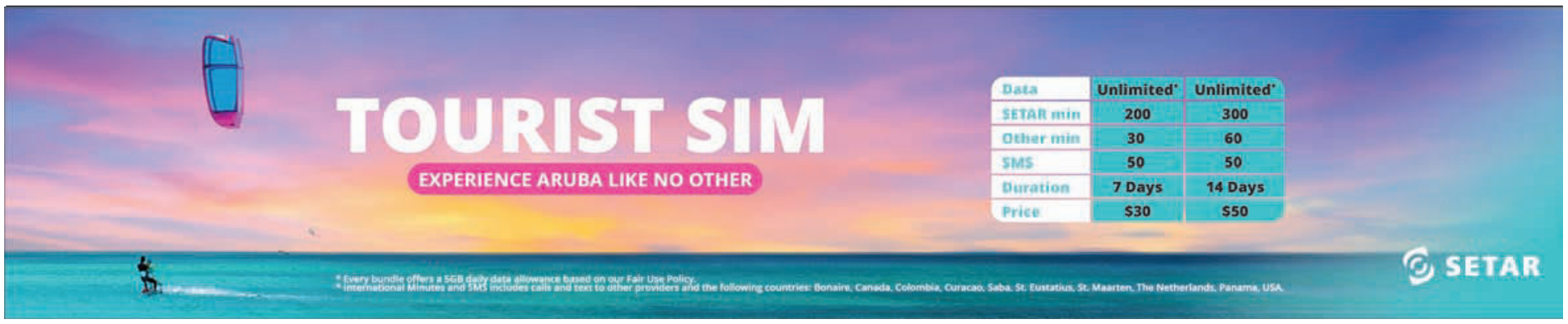
Sales
Mark Gomes
Sulaika Croes

Classifieds
classified@cspnv.com

Distribution and Collection
accounting@bondia.com

Social / Website
Juan Luis Pinto

Weststraat 22
T: 582-7800
E: news@arubatoday.com
W: www.arubatoday.com
@ArubaTodayNews



Nuggets star Nikola Jokic hyperextended his left knee and will be evaluated in 4 weeks

By TIM REYNOLDS
AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — Nikola Jokic is only going to miss a few weeks, which is surely cause for the Denver Nuggets to take a giant sigh of relief.

The Nuggets' superstar center has been diagnosed with a hyperextended left knee, the team said Tuesday, adding that the three-time MVP will be re-evaluated in four weeks.

It's an obvious blow to the already short-handed Nuggets — but is not a season-ending issue nor one that would require surgical repair. If Jokic misses a month, that means he would be sidelined for about 16 games but could be playing again before February's NBA All-Star Game.

The 6-foot-11 Jokic considered by many to be the best player in the world right now got hurt with about three seconds left in the first half of Denver's 147-123 loss in Miami on Monday night.

Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic (15) walks on the court during the first half of an NBA basketball game against the Miami Heat, Monday, Dec. 29, 2025, in Miami.

Associated Press

Jokic entered Tuesday ranked fifth in the NBA in scoring this season at 29.6 points per game, plus leads the league with averages of 12.2 rebounds and 11 assists per contest. The only other player in NBA history to average at least 12 rebounds and 11 assists over a full season was Oscar Robertson for the Cincinnati Royals in 1961-62.

"Obviously, it's part of the game," Nuggets guard Jamal Murray said Monday night after the game speaking before the team got the word on the severity of Jokic's injury. "But we never want to see it happen. ... Next man up. We've got to focus on what's in here."

Denver has five games left on a seven-game road trip, one that resumes Wednesday when the Nuggets visit the Toronto Raptors.

Jokic was alone under the basket and appeared to step forward to help Denver's Spencer Jones defend a drive by Miami's Jaime Jaquez Jr. as time was about to expire in the second quarter. While backtracking, Jones stepped on Jokic's left foot and it seemed the center's knee buckled a bit.❑

Cowboys waive cornerback Trevon Diggs to end tumultuous finish to his Dallas career

By SCHUYLER DIXON
AP Pro Football Writer

FRISCO, Texas (AP) — The Cowboys waived cornerback Trevon Diggs on Tuesday, ending a tumultuous final season a game early in a Dallas career that never lived up to the promise of a 2021 All-Pro performance that included 11 interceptions.

The move came five days before Dallas' season finale Sunday at the New York Giants, with the Cowboys (7-8-1) already guaranteed to miss the playoffs for the second year in a row. Diggs will be a free agent after clearing waivers.

The season began with Diggs playing in the opener, earlier than expected coming off the recovery from his second major knee surgery in two years.

Diggs missed eight games after sustaining a concussion in an accident at home, something Diggs waited two months to try to explain to reporters. He said he was hit in the head by a mounting pole while trying to install a TV.

The team said Diggs' delayed return was more about issues with the 27-year-old's knees.

Asked during the absence what the team needed to see from Diggs to get him back on the field, coach Brian Schottenheimer said the sixth-year player needed to show consistency in many areas in practice and in meetings. Owner Jerry Jones flatly said near the end of the absence that Diggs wasn't healthy enough to play.

A person with knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press the decision on Diggs wasn't the result of a specific incident. Diggs' departure was a culmination of factors, including performance and off-field issues, and the move was best for Diggs and the Cowboys, the person said on condition of anonymity because the team wasn't commenting specifically on Diggs.

The Cowboys withheld a workout bonus in Diggs' contract after he spent last offseason rehabbing his latest knee injury with his own medical personnel. ❑

Dallas Cowboys cornerback Trevon Diggs (7) walks along he sideline during the first half of an NFL football game against the Los Angeles Chargers, Sunday, Dec. 21, 2025, in Arlington, Texas.

Associated Press

Rested or rusty? Top four playoff seeds eager to show they are ready as CFP quarterfinals arrive

By MICHAEL MAROT
AP Sports Writer

No. 1 Indiana spent several December weeks reveling in the luster of the best season in school history.

They sung the school's fight song in the confetti celebration following their first Big Ten championship since 1967 and first outright title since 1945. They were featured on "60 Minutes." They signed their offensive and defensive coordinators to contract extensions. They even flew to New Yorck City and took photos of quarterback Fernando Mendoza and his brand new Heisman Trophy in Times Square.

And now that they know their Rose Bowl opponent after Alabama rallied for a 34-24 victory at Oklahoma, Indiana has spent the past 10 days prepping to prove they're worthy of holding both the No. 1 ranking and the top seed in the College Football Playoff.

"We understand that just like the Big Ten Championship game, just like any other big games we played this season, this page is now folded, although I will be in

Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza (15) answers questions during a press conference ahead of Thursday's Rose Bowl College Football Playoff against Alabama Tuesday, Dec. 30, 2025, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

the (Heisman) fraternity for the rest of my life," Mendoza said after returning to campus with the Heisman. "Our focus right now is winning the College Football Playoff. That's what would make this trophy so much sweeter."

Last year was the first for the expanded 12-team playoff, and the top four seeds with first-round byes Oregon, Georgia, Bosie State and Arizona State all lost in the quarterfinals. This year's top seeds Indiana, Ohio State, Georgia and Texas Tech want to prove last year was a fluke.

Georgia (12-1) face conference foe Ole Miss (12-1) in a New Year's Day rematch at the Sugar Bowl; the Bulldogs dealt the Rebels their only loss. The defending champion Buckeyes (12-1) have spent the past couple weeks getting healthy and making one key change. Coach Ryan Day will be calling the plays when Ohio State faces Miami (11-2) in the Cotton Bowl on Wednesday night.

"There's not a game that's gone by where I'm not involved or listening to every call and making sure it's what we've agreed upon going in (to the game)," Day said, explaining why he's taking over the play-calling from new South Florida coach Brian Hartline. "So, it's similar to the way it was before."

The other quarterfinal matchup pits Texas Tech (12-1), the Big 12 champion, against Oregon (11-1).

The Hoosiers (13-0) never lost their focus in 2025, thanks partly to second-year coach Curt Cignetti but mostly because the Hoosiers' returning contingent players such as linebacker Aiden Fisher, defensive end Mikail Kamara and receivers Elijah Sarratt and Omar Cooper Jr. wouldn't allow it. Neither did the newcomers such as Mendoza and starting center Pat Coogan, who immediately embraced Indiana's mission to avenge the two losses that tainted Cignetti's otherwise flawless first season: At eventual national champion Ohio State and at eventual national runner-up Notre Dame.❑

Six-time IndyCar champion Scott Dixon receives a knighthood from his native New Zealand

Scott Dixon celebrates winning the IndyCar Detroit Grand Prix auto race in Detroit, Sunday, June 2, 2024.

Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Six-time IndyCar champion Scott Dixon was awarded a knighthood Wednesday in his native New Zealand's New Year honors list.

"I've been called a lot of things, but I never thought that 'Sir' was going to be one of them," Dixon said. "That was kind of crazy. Totally out of the blue ... You automatically go back to the start like the first time driving a go-kart and then all the rest of the memories happened at warp speed."

Dixon, who won the Indianapolis 500 in 2008, is recognized for services to motor sport. The Chip Ganassi Racing driver was inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America in 2024.

"Sir Scott is a hero to young New Zealand motor sport fans and his work fundraising for children's charities is invaluable," New Zealand's Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said.

Scott Ronald Glyndwr Dixon, now a Knight Commander of the New Zealand Order of Merit, was born in Australia to New Zealand-born parents who later returned to live in Auckland.

He won karting titles in Australia and New Zealand before heading to the United States where he raced in Indy Lights and CART series before moving to IndyCar in 2003.❑